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What You Should Know About Brucellosis!

Brucellosis isn't a problem confined to livestock alone. It infects humans as "undulant fever" or "malta fever." Its cost is both in money and human suffering. Let's take a closer look at the situation.

by John B. Herrick

WHY BE SO concerned about brucellosis? One reason is that this disease is costing Iowa farmers between 2 and 3 million dollars every year. Another reason: It produces in man a serious malady known as "undulant fever." If we can control brucellosis in livestock, we also will be taking a big step in doing away with undulant fever in humans.

The fact that between 400 and 700 persons in Iowa contract brucellosis annually makes it a serious public health hazard. Human suffering can't be evaluated in dollars and cents. But to be aware of the seriousness of this disease, just talk with someone who has had it.

What You Can Do . . .

- . . . on your own farm:
- Test your cattle and remove reactors as soon as possible.
- Start a program of vaccinating calves immediately.
- Take sanitary precautions to prevent reinfection of your herd, and buy brucellosis-free animals only.
- Use boars from brucellosis-free herds only.
- If you are a breeder of pure-bred swine and sell breeding stock, maintain a brucellosis accredited herd.

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- Find out all you can about brucellosis, help inform your neighbors and let your legislator know how he can help you control brucellosis.

Brucellosis can be controlled if we all do our part!

Financial losses suffered by livestock men because of abortions, sterility, low milk production and weak offspring can be prevented by livestock men themselves—if they're informed about the disease and make use of available means for its control and eradication.

Testing results show that Iowa has a 6.8 percent brucellosis infection of native cattle compared with a 3.5 to 4.5 percent infection of cattle on the national level. Iowa differs from any other state so far as brucellosis control is concerned; we have twice as many hogs as any other state, we import more beef cattle than any other state, and we have a large number of dairy cattle. Our present laws allow rather free movement of cattle—whether infected or not—within the state. So we have a triple threat in the spread of brucellosis.

Biggest Problem . . .

The biggest stumbling block in the control of brucellosis is simply lack of information by livestock owners. Rapid strides have been made on the technical aspects of the disease. While some questions still are unanswered, authorities in the veterinary field know that we have the techniques, manpower and

equipment to control brucellosis—providing livestock owners are informed, willing to make necessary sacrifices and demand control measures.

Iowa livestock men have been confused both by differences in requirements of other states governing movement of cattle and by differences of opinion on the ways to control the disease. But the fact that brucellosis can be controlled is exemplified by the fact that three states—Maine, New Hampshire and North Carolina—have less than 1-percent infection. Other states are setting up machinery to follow suit.

Recent Grade-A milk ordinances in Chicago and other cities along with the Market Milk Law as passed by the Iowa legislature have stimulated the thinking of Iowa livestock owners on brucellosis control measures.

Educational Program

In Iowa lack of information about brucellosis is one of the biggest problems. So during the fall of 1951, county extension directors set up educational programs on the county level with the aid of Iowa State College extension veterinarians. In this way they hope to inform the people in each county about brucellosis so that they themselves will do something about the disease and stimulate action on the state level.

State, federal and local practicing veterinarians have combined forces

with state and county extension personnel to work on the educational program. Meetings are held several places in each county informing livestock owners about the disease. At present 40 counties have active educational programs under way. Also, purebred dairy, beef and swine owners have met and discussed brucellosis and ways and means of control.

The state Veterinary Medical Association, following discussions in district meetings, went on record during the 1952 state convention suggesting that the state Secretary of Agriculture call meetings of livestock organization leaders to discuss a brucellosis control program for Iowa. Four meetings of this type have already been held, and more are to be held to formulate state-wide action on education and legislation.

As Things Are Now . . .

Iowa has had a very liberal brucellosis program. Under the federal-state cooperative test, a herd owner has been able to have his herd tested and receive indemnities on his reactor animals if he marketed them immediately. There have been relatively few "takers" of this program because farmers and veterinarians felt that testing alone wasn't the whole answer.

Also, the idea of indemnities hasn't been attractive, and the fee for testing has been inadequate for the veterinarian. On the other hand, many herds are tested for informative purposes—with the herd owner paying the veterinarian and removing the reactors whenever he felt like it.

Although quite a number of livestock owners now are following a calfhood vaccination program, in most counties only 10 to 25 percent of the calves are vaccinated. Other owners have done nothing. And the importation of infected cattle into Iowa certainly does not aid a control program. Iowa doesn't have a law requiring breeding animals to be brucellosis-free.

More and more swine producers are becoming aware of the brucellosis problem, but far too few are yet doing anything about it. However swine producers are now meeting at the state level to discuss leg-

islation needed to control this costly disease.

It is easier to control brucellosis in swine than in cattle—even though there's no vaccine for swine. The results of swine tests must be interpreted from a herd standpoint instead of an individual. The purchase of breeding stock, especially the boar, from a brucellosis-free herd should be the rule for every swine producer. Brucellosis in swine usually is spread by the boar. But there are now 14 officially certified brucellosis-free herds in Iowa. A list of these herds is available from the office of the State Veterinarian. (For additional information on controlling brucellosis in swine see "*Check Swine Brucellosis*" in the December 1950 issue of the IOWA FARM SCIENCE.)

Must Be "All-Out"

To assure success, every livestock owner—whether of beef cattle, swine or dairy cattle—must cooperate in any control program. The Grade A milk producer, for example, thinks he's being penalized if he's required to produce milk from brucellosis-free herds while his neighbor has no control program. The swine producer, especially the breeder, should maintain a brucellosis-free herd.

In general if all cattle owners would start official calfhood vaccination now, then test their herds and remove reactors as soon as possible, the problem in Iowa wouldn't be nearly so great. And if all swine producers would buy boars only from brucellosis-free herds, the problem in swine would be greatly reduced.

What Shall We Do?

The people of Iowa apparently are not interested in a program that would give "free" testing, vaccinating and indemnities. This would mean higher taxes to pay for such a program. And it is believed that livestock owners should have enough pride and interest in economy and health to control the disease on their own farms.

Farmers are interested in preventing bringing infected cattle into the state and in restricting movement of infected cattle within the state unless they move to market.

Until December 1, 1950, quarantines on cattle imported into Iowa had no definite time limit. Many thousands of cattle were imported into the state under quarantine without benefit of any test and finally entered commerce and lost their identity. No doubt many of these animals were later tested and indemnities paid on them.

Since December 1, 1950, feeder quarantines have been limited as to time. Female cattle under 18 months of age are eligible for a quarantine period of 12 months for feeder purposes. Heifers and cows over 18 months of age may enter the state for a 90-day feeder period. At the end of this period, if still on hand, they must be tested and unless they are non-reactors must be slaughtered. But these cattle can do a lot of damage in 90 days, especially if not quarantined.

We need more rigid control of these cattle. We should not allow dairy and beef breeding cattle—except brucellosis-free cattle—to come into Iowa. A law would be justified making it mandatory to test within 30 days prior to sale all dairy and breeding cattle, other than animals officially vaccinated, and they would be allowed to move freely within the state until they were 38 months of age.

But remember that vaccination alone is only part of a control program. The mere fact that an animal has been vaccinated while young doesn't mean it will be a safe animal later in life. Vaccination and testing must go hand-in-hand for a sound control program.

People Endangered

This could be accomplished immediately by arbitrary legislation. However, the demand for this type of legislation should come from the people themselves as they become more informed on the real danger and problem of brucellosis in Iowa.

The problem certainly is serious and unfortunately not confined to livestock alone. Because public health is endangered year after year, selfish interest should not stand in the way of the removal of this serious disease hazard to our livestock and our people.